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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 005965

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STATE FOR SCA/FO GASTRIGHT, SCA/A, S/CRS, SA/PB, S/CT,
EUR/RPM
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN
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SUBJECT: MEETING WITH GENERAL DOSTUM

REF: KABUL 5931

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Richard Norland for reasons 1.4(b)
) and (d).

¶1. (C) BEGIN SUMMARY: Uzbek factional leader General Abdul Rashid Dostum is feeling increasingly frustrated over his lack of a significant role in Afghan decision making and his lack of contact with the Palace. Once a respected (even feared) force in national politics, he has been side-lined from the central power structure, although much of the blame lies in his own behavior. Recently renewed criticism of his human rights record has added to his insecurity. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) On 23 December, Charge and Poloff met with General Dostum in his newest residence in Kabul's Sherpoor district. Standing in stark contrast to the adobe mud houses and shops around it, Dostum's home looks and is furnished very much like a three star hotel from the Persian Gulf. Marble, chrome, high ceilings and over-stuffed chairs abound, but there was little warmth in Dostum's latest foray into architecture. Dostum opened the meeting with references to his long relationship with USG officials, mentioning Michael Spann (killed by the Taliban in a prison uprising in 2001) and others with whom he had dealt over the years. He noted that he had kept a low profile over the past several months, and expressed some dissatisfaction with the Uzbek Parliamentarians during his absence from Kabul. He touched on the rumors that had circulated about him when he was away, citing stories that he was gathering weapons for distribution, meeting with both the Taliban and Gulbeddin Hekmatyar, and even starting to foment a coup. Dostum claimed that he had cleared up the stories with President Karzai, and that the sources of the rumors had disappeared when Karzai's people had tried to investigate and cross-examine them.

¶3. (C) Like other warlords mentioned in the Human Rights Watch report (reftel), Dostum was clearly upset over allegations that he had committed human rights abuses. "My sin was to fight for my country", he said. He noted that the report had already attracted criticism in Afghanistan, and

asked the Charge to talk to President Karzai about it. "I've been called so many names, there are no names left", he said. Lumping Malalai Joya (an outspoken anti-Mujaheddin Member of Parliament from Farah Province) and Sima Simar (Director of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission/AIHRC) together as major culprits, he claimed that the allegations were total provocations. He believed that Sima Simar had a psychological complex, and that President Karzai should intervene with her, although he also said that some people believed that President Karzai was secretly behind the report and had given Sima Simar his go-ahead.

14. (C) Dostum clearly feels left out of events now, and stressed that he could still play an important role in facing the Taliban threat. Claiming that he had no ties to either Russia or Iran, he said that "If I stay home, more rumors will start". He returned to the theme of wanting to be engaged repeatedly during the meeting, asking that the Charge recommend to Karzai that a suitable role be found for him. "Apparently I am his Chief of Staff", he said, "but it is an empty position and I have no clarity about what I am supposed to be doing in this position. I have tried to see President Karzai since I am supposed to be his (military) Chief of Staff, but it takes two weeks for me to meet him". He clearly hopes for a defined security command function, criticizing the state of affairs at the MOI and MOD, and reminding the Charge that "soldiers who come from abroad are expensive and don't fight well" (except for Americans and Canadians, whom he thought were good fighters). He believed that the Afghans should be doing the fighting. Referring to Musa Qala, he said that it had only made the Taliban name more powerful. He said that military operations should not be carried out unless they were well-planned, and none of the four

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operations there were well done. The result was that the Taliban were able to claim a victory. The enemy was tough and only understood power, and thus "the government should make use of strong, influential people" (meaning himself) against them.

15. (C) The National United Front - Dostum mentioned the recent formation of the United Front (Jebel-e-Mutahed-e-Milli-Afghanistan), inter-alia citing MP Professor Sayyaf, ex-President Rabbani, Wolesi Jirga Speaker Yunus Qanooni, MP Haji Elmas, Army Chief of Staff Bismillah Khan, and even the former-Shah's grandson, Mustapha Zaher, as members. It was a new political front, which would be multi-ethnic and not in opposition to the government. Dostum stressed that the United Front would not be a problem for Karzai, and that if it seemed to be turning against the government, he would pull out of it.

16. (C) The Charge did his best to calm Dostum's quasi-paranoia, noting that he had indeed been a friend of the USA and the Coalition forces and was also a supporter of the central government. It was clear that Karzai also still depended on Dostum's support. Reminding Dostum that President Karzai and even an AIHRC spokesman had already criticized the Human Rights Watch report, the Charge said it was up to the Afghan people to make decisions about going forward on transitional justice. The Charge added that Dostum's advice remained essential, and agreed that it would be a good idea for him to have a positive role in shaping current events.

COMMENT

17. (C) Over the past several months, Dostum has come in for increasing criticism from his own fellow Uzbek Parliamentarians, who express both frustration and annoyance over his attempts to control them from a distance. Dostum calls the MPs even when they are in plenary session, and has attacked them for not voting according to his instructions. Despite their annoyance in private, the MPs say that they cannot go against him publicly, and they fear that if the central government makes a move against him, it would only

force the Uzbeks - whether or not they like him - to unite in his support.

18. (C) Rumors about Dostum also flow freely around Kabul. When Uzbek MP Faizollah Zeki, once a close Dostum supporter, remained unreachable for several weeks in Uzbekistan, Dostum was said to have had his guards beat and rape him. Zeki denied the report, but many do not believe his denial. Another current tale is that Dostum recently raped a young servant working in his house, and stories about his drunkenness are constant fare. Only a few days ago, Poloff was told by an employee at the French Embassy that Dostum had tried to get a visa to go to France for medical treatment, but that the French Ambassador - not wanting to issue the visa - told him the process would take many months. A similar story is attributed to the Turks, based on a rumor that Dostum slapped a Turkish policeman on a visit there and was no longer welcome in the country.

19. (C) Whatever the truth of the various rumors, it is clear that Dostum has been left out of Afghan power circles and feels deeply frustrated. His fellow Uzbek MPs claim they tried to convince him to run for Parliament in 2005, seeing it as a way for him to maintain prestige and power, but unlike other ex-warlords (Rabbani, Sayyaf, etc.) he chose not to do so. He is now paying the price for his mistake, and it is unlikely that the Karzai government trusts him enough to include him in any responsible role. (Karzai referred to him as "a cheat" in a recent meeting with Charge.) His frustration and annoyance will continue to grow and we will continue to try to manage it so that Dostum does not shift from being merely a surly supporter to becoming an active opponent of Karzai. END COMMENT

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